RESPONSES TO THE INTRUSION OF FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines two of the ways by which working women resolve the competing demands of their household and employment roles. Using data from a large insurance company we first investigate the extent to which men and women take absence days or illness days for the purpose of attending to family obligations, presumably short-term crises. We examine how the pattern of illness day taking varies with age of the employee and with age of the youngest child. We next investigate terminations from the company, using logit and survival methods, and assess the extent to which gender differences in reason for departure can be attributed to (presumably) long-term conflicts between the responsibilities of work and family.

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INTRODUCTION

At this point in our comprehension of gender differences in career features, the intrusion of family and household responsibilities into women's work lives is an established datum (e.g., Corcoran and Duncan 1979; Coverman 1983; Hanson 1983; Kreps and Leaper 1976; Marini 1989; Sørensen and McLanahan 1987). Women, frequently, have work histories that are discontinuous, due to child bearing and to child rearing obligations. Married women tend to rate their husbands' work careers as more important to the family unit than their own (Finch 1983, pp. 134-140; Fogarty, Rapoport, and Rapoport 1971, pp. 236-299), an assessment shared by a majority of men (Hoffman and Reed 1981). With respect to the household division of labor, there is evidence that men spend less time on domestic chores than working wives and make fewer concessions to family needs in their career decisions (Duncan, Schuman, and Duncan 1973, pp. 7-19; Hofferth and Moore 1979; Wilkie 1988). Further, when the demands of dual careers come into conflict, the resolution generally favors the husband's work needs (Pleck 1977; Poloma and Garland 1971). Research findings of these sorts mean that the occupational possibilities of a working wife often must evolve, on the one hand, in the context of her husband's job requirements and, on the other hand, in reference to family and child rearing responsibilities.

To manage a work career under such circumstances is, at best, a difficult proposition. In order to continue in the labor force, married women adopt a mix of strategies to balance their potentially conflicting role obligations. One set of calculations relates to long-term decisions, especially to choice of occupation and employment arrangements. Jobs that are part-time, that correspond in work hours to the school day, that match the rhythm of the school calendar, that permit flexibility in scheduling work assignments—either in time or in place—are the kinds of positions which permit some coordination between the competing demands of career and family (Bourne and Wikler 1978; Kreps and Leaper 1976, p.70). In comparison, the sorts of jobs to be avoided, if a woman wishes to have a more or less traditional home life, are ones likely to intrude onto family time; requiring either long work days, unpredictable hours, or travel to distant cities.

The preceding considerations relate to *long-term strategies*, and suggest the features of occupations which will be attractive to many women, in recognition of the role conflict they are apt to encounter once a family is begun. There is considerable evidence that the kinds of jobs where women are, in fact, over-represented are the very positions in which the conflict is minimized (Doescher 1980; Polachek 1979; Wilkie 1988), though the extent to which their occupational choices reflect the calculations we have outlined, versus preferences of employers or societal views regarding "suitable" work, is less certain (Bielby and Baron 1986; Brito and Jusenius 1978; Gronau 1988, p. 295).

Once employment is entered, even if the job provides some opportunity to attend to household responsibilities, conflicts with the home management role will surely arise. Most jobs require an employee to be at the workplace during certain hours; yet some family chores cannot be deferred to the end of the work day (e.g., care of a sick child, substituting for an unavailable baby sitter, meeting with a school teacher). Family obligations of these sorts are not well addressed in the calculus of long-term career planning that is carried out by many women, such as with respect to occupational choice. Rather, these obligations represent sudden, unanticipated intrusions into the work domain. They stand as urgent demands for attention and are disruptive of work schedules in a way that permits little anticipatory planning.

The intrusion of family concerns into the workplace is of interest for two reasons. First, it provides insight into how family responsibilities are managed when they cannot be deferred. Second, it permits an assessment of the consequence of the household division of labor for the career attainments of men and women. In regard to the first question, we hypothesize that a common manner of response is by taking a vacation day or calling in sick—one of the few institutionally available ways of controlling work time. In regard to the second, extrapolating from evidence about the household division of labor, noted earlier, we suggest that it is working women, rather than their spouses, who typically respond to the unanticipated family demands and use this time-control mechanism.

The preceding argument refers to the *occasional intrusion* of family matters into the work setting. In households where the burden of managing careers and family has become severe, where the role conflict is pervasive, we expect one spouse—presumably the wife—to resolve the conflict by withdrawing from the labor force. Gender differences in the rate of employment separation have been examined by a number of investigators (e.g., Barnes and Jones 1974; Meitzen 1986; Report of a Special Task Force 1976, p.59; Viscusi 1980). One conclusion is that women are more likely to quit in order to exit from the labor force, while men terminate to move to a different job. However, what we know about gender differences in the causes of departure is based primarily on inferences from the analysis of aggregate separation rates. A more direct approach would be to examine the determinants of detailed *reason* for departure.

These two topics, gender differences in the pattern of absence-day taking and in reason for terminating employment, are complementary issues. Each relates to the division of household responsibilities between working spouses, and to strategies for accommodating the often conflicting demands of work and family. The first topic refers to the processing of unexpected and short term exigencies, the second to more deliberate and consequential calculations for the purpose of resolving persistent role tensions. Yet, both are strategies for conflict management between the same two role domains; both entail

making a choice between work career and family. In each case, the fine details as to how the decision is reached should illuminate our understanding of the dynamics of work commitment and marital accommodation.

We investigate these issues using information from the employee data base of a large insurance company with headquarters in the northeast. The company is not unionized. It utilizes a human resource system based on formal procedures of job evaluation and compensation management. In particular, all positions below the rank of Assistant Vice President are assigned to one of 20 grade levels; these grades constitute a hierarchy of overlapping salary ranges. Promotion, in this formulation, is defined in terms of an increase in grade level, whether or not accompanied by a change in job specific duties. Aside from a small number of maintenance and craft workers (not included in the study), the employees are white collar.

The available records cover work histories within the company of employees during the period 1971-78. As a steady-state personnel system, there were approximately 16,000 workers at any point in time; with the addition of entrants and departers we have approximately 40,000 job histories. The employee data base is especially valuable for exploring the conflict between family and work roles because of the presence of two complementary files: There is a record of absence days taken by employees; also, for each terminating worker there is information from an exit interview, which includes details on the reason for departure. The completion rate of this interview approaches 100 percent because it is part of the severance process, at which time arrangements are made for payment of the final salary check.

THE ANALYSIS OF ABSENCE DAYS

The absence-day data available to us are most complete for the late 1970s; for this reason, and because of a need to coordinate with other analyses undertaken with the data set, the calendar year 1977 was chosen for study. This investigation, then, covers absence days in that year and uses as observations all 9788 employee records with matching information in the main data base. Deleted from the study were part-year employees, workers who took time off for army reserve training, and women who gave birth in 1977 or in 1978.[1]

Several kinds of absence days are defined in the personnel regulations of the insurance company. Absences can be assigned by an employee to vacation, illness, long-term disability, "personal days," or to one of several minor categories. This section investigates the determinants of the measure, "total number of absence days taken in 1977"; the next section examines the illness-day component of this measure.

The explanatory variables include terms for sex, other individual characteristics, and for status in the company: salary grade, seniority, corporate division, and location. We are principally interested in the gender disparity, but it is necessary to introduce other terms which might influence a decision to miss work. Table 1 presents absence means for the explanatory variables.[2] An examination of this material is revealing of several patterns: With respect to race, blacks and Hispanics take off more days than either whites or Orientals; also, women take about two days more per year than men. There are evident trends with regard to age, education, grade level and seniority—more absences are recorded for older, less educated, high grade level, and long tenure workers. Possible reasons are a greater sensitivity to illness by older individuals, and the allocation of vacation days by the company on the basis of salary grade and service duration. The division and location effects are also substantial, but they will not be discussed here as these terms are introduced as controls, to clarify relationships among variables more germane to the analysis.

Column 1 of Table 2 reports race and sex effects from OLS regressions of number of absence days in 1977. We note, again, that blacks and Hispanics take two and a quarter to two and a half more days per year than whites, Orientals some three fewer days than whites. Our principal concern, however, is with the gender effect, and we observe that women, on average, take 1.88 more absence days than men.

Yet the female term in column 1 is not an accurate estimate of the true sex difference in absence-day taking. A number of variables are confounded with gender, and they must be introduced explicitly in order to obtain an unbiased estimate. In particular, the insurance company allocates *vacation days* in terms of seniority and grade level. Workers with fewer than 5 years' service receive 10 days per year, employees with 5 to 15 years' service receive 15 days, and employees with more than 15 years' seniority are allotted 20 vacation days. The company also specifies vacation days according to grade level—15 days for grade 13, 17 days for grade 14, 19 days for grade 15 and 20 days for grades 16 and above. An employee is entitled to the larger number of vacation days for which he or she qualifies, using either the seniority or the grade level calculation. (For grades 1-12 there is no alternative calculation to the one based on seniority.) Thus, to the degree that men and women differ on the two variables, seniority and grade level, the greater number of absence days taken by women cannot be viewed as arising from family and household responsibilities.

Column 2 reports the results of a model in which controls have been added to incorporate the organizational rules that determine number of vacation days. The coefficients appear to reflect the company's vacation policy fairly accurately. Seniority is clearly the more important of the two structural variables; absence days increase with years of service in a step-function fashion that conforms with the rules. (The first three terms, *Sen*[2] - *Sen*[4], refer to

Table 1. Absence Means for Variables in the Study, Insurance Company, 1977[a]

1. Race		**5. Salary Grade Level**[b]	
White	25.65	*SGL(1)* = 1,2	24.09
Black	28.11	*SGL(2)* 3	24.57
Oriental	22.43	*SGL(3)* 4	26.14
Hispanic	28.45	*SGL(4)* 5,6	27.98
		SGL(5) 7-9	26.84
2. Sex		*SGL(6)* 10-12	25.20
Male	24.71	*SGL(7)* ≥ 13	28.14
Female	26.81		
		6. Seniority[c]	
3. Age[c]		*Sen(1)* < 1 year	19.34
AGE(1) < 23 yrs.	23.03	*Sen(2)* 1-2 yrs.	24.70
AGE(2) 23-26	26.04	*Sen(3)* 2-3	24.89
AGE(3) 26-31	26.84	*Sen(4)* 3-5	27.06
AGE(4) 31-40	26.73	*Sen(5)* 5-9	29.08
AGE(5) 40-50	27.16	*Sen(6)* 9-15	29.12
AGE(6) ≥ 50	28.84	*Sen(7)* ≥ 15	30.74
4. Education		**7. Corporate Division**	
EDUC(1) H.S. or less	27.89	*Agency*	20.93
EDUC(2) H.S. plus some college	25.56	*Corporate*	26.22
EDUC(3) H.S. plus 60 or more credits	25.19	*Group*	27.12
		Individual	29.37
EDUC(4) B.A. degree	24.10	*Investment*	24.77
EDUC(5) B.A. plus some grad. work	25.43	**8. Geographic Location**	
EDUC(6) M.A., Ph.D.	24.47	*Home Office*	28.21
		Other location	24.88

Notes: [a] Entries are mean number of days absent from work during 1977. Number of observations = 9.788.
[b] SGL(1) dummies refer to the 20 salary grades of the insurance company. (1) = lowest grade, (20) = highest grade.
[c] Categories constructed from continuous variables (*age, seniority*) contain their low endpoints.

absence days taken by employees with 1-5 years' service; the next two terms, *Sen[5]* and *Sen[6]*, pertain to the interval 5-15 years, and the last term to employees with 15 and more years' seniority.[3]) The coefficients of these terms convey added days beyond the base category *Sen(1)*, which denotes absence days taken by employees with less than one year's service. (For these workers, vacation days are a fraction of the initial 10 day allotment, pro-rated according to months of service.)

The grade level terms also approximate the organizational rules. In particular, the effects are statistically insignificant, close to zero, through *SGL(6)*, which covers grades 10-12. Only *SGL(7)*, which denotes grades 13 and above, shows an absence day effect. Our results for the two control variables, incidentally, do not mirror the organization's rules more precisely

Table 2. Regression of Number of Absence Days in 1977 on Individual and Organization Variables (OLS Estimates)[a]

Independent Variable[b]	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Intercept	24.305*	15.286*	15.869*	9.618*
Black	2.283*	3.191*	3.227*	1.881*
Oriental	−3.155**	−1.397	−0.830	−1.134
Hispanic	2.672*	3.453*	3.387*	2.456*
Female	1.876*	3.984*	3.659*	4.251*
Salary Grade (2)		−0.981	−0.864	−0.719
SGL(3)		−0.413	−0.143	−0.441
SGL(4)		0.228	0.641	0.005
SGL(5)		−0.971	−0.220	−1.175
SGL(6)		−1.134	0.045	−0.719
SGL(7)		2.220**	3.861*	3.326**
Seniority (2)		5.660*	5.547*	5.115*
Sen(3)		5.980*	5.757*	5.397*
Sen(4)		8.099*	7.686*	7.143*
Sen(5)		10.124*	9.421*	8.678*
Sen(6)		10.680*	9.792*	9.250*
Sen(7)		13.242*	12.160*	11.198*
Age (years)			0.021	0.061*
Educ. (years of schooling)			−0.367*	−0.372**
Corporate				3.307*
Group				6.784*
Individual				6.218*
Investment				4.718*
Home office				1.843*
R^2	.01	.05	.05	.07
N	9788	9788	9788	9788

Notes: ** $p < .05$, * $p < .01$
[a] Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Absence day mean = 26.26 days.
[b] Deleted terms from categorical variables are *White, SGL(1), Sen(1)* and *Agency division. Age* and *education* are introduced as continuous variables.

for several reasons. First, our data refer to total absence days, not vacation days. Second, employees can shift vacation days between calendar years. Third, our analytic format describes the grade level and seniority effects as *additive* whereas, in practice, a choice is made by a worker between the two calculations in determining the vacation day allowance. Nonetheless, the pattern of results constitutes a reasonably accurate representation of the company's vacation policy.

Our principal interest concerns the impact of gender on number of absence days. After controlling for the organizational variables that determine the vacation allotment, it is apparent that the sex and race disparities are larger than before—Blacks and Hispanics average some 3.3 absence days more than whites; females some 4.0 absence days more than males (column 2). The smaller effects when controls were omitted (column 1) are due to minorities and women being overrepresented in low salary grades and having relatively little seniority; consequently, they are eligible for fewer vacation days. In other words, the controls show that the gap in absence days between whites and minorities, and between males and females, is considerably larger than appeared initially. Because the column (2) entries have been purged of the influence of the organization's rules, we take these values to be a reasonable approximation of the true sex and race differentials.

To what extent is this finding due to the association of gender with other variables which, in turn, affect the number of absence days? For example, if female employees were older than males, and if older workers are more prone to illness, then it would be incorrect to attribute the sex effect to household and family responsibilities. In columns (3) and (4) we investigate this possibility. In column (3) continuous variables for age and education have been added to the basic model. We note that the effect of these controls on the female term is modest, a decrease from 3.98 (column 2) to 3.66 absence days.

Perhaps women take off more days because they are concentrated in divisions or reside in communities where a high rate of absence taking is the norm. This possibility is examined in column (4). We find that these considerations do, indeed, alter the gender effect—they raise it. Net of the variables in the full model, the female term can be associated with 4.25 days lost from work in a year. (In contrast, the large initial racial effects reported in column (2) are reduced by inclusion of the control variables.) These findings constitute our initial evidence for the contention that the gender difference in number of absence days arises from considerations *external* to the work organization.

DETERMINANTS OF NUMBER OF ILLNESS DAYS

We presume that employed women are burdened with a disproportionate share of family obligations. When children are sick, for example, it is they, rather than husbands, who take time off from work. Our analysis of absence days is suggestive on this matter but the absence-day category is a bit crude; it includes vacation days, of which most employees—male and female—take their full allotment. Moreover, using a scarce vacation day to accommodate household needs is problematic as this can disrupt family vacation plans. Illness days, however, are not fixed in number by organizational rules, and we

postulate that use of these days would be a more common mode of response. We therefore examine the illness day component of absence days, in the expectation that this measure will permit a refined assessment of the consequence of household responsibilities for the work behaviors of women and men.

Table 3 presents illness day means for the principal variables in this analysis. While the average number of illness days taken by all company employees in 1977 was 7.07, the entries in panel 2 indicate that men took 4.33 illness days while female workers averaged 8.03 days. The racial effects are also large, and reveal the same pattern that was noted earlier with absence days—blacks and Hispanics report more illness days than whites or Orientals.

Concerning salary grade, age, and seniority the pattern of effects is different—even the reverse of what was observed with absence days. In particular, low grade level and young workers (with the exception of the oldest group) take more illness days; also, the strong seniority trend seen with absence days is now lacking.[4] A possible explanation for the reversals is that illness days are not allocated in accordance with a corporate rule, in reference to seniority or grade level; absence days, however, reflect such an allocation in that they include the vacation allotment as a component. The education and grade level trends are especially pronounced: moving from low to high education, the number of illness days declines by 55 percent; moving from low to high grade level, illness days decline by 65 percent. These results could derive from compositional effects (e.g., educated and high grade level employees tend to be male), or from motivational differences among workers in the various salary grades of the company. However, because we are discussing zero-order relationships our observations here can only be suggestive.

Accounting For the Gender Effect

Column (1) of Table 4 reports an initial model of the sex and race contributions to number of illness days taken during 1977. Whereas, with absence days, we argued that controls for seniority and salary grade must be present in order to properly assess the effects of the race and gender terms, this is not the case with illness days. These are taken as needed, at the initiative of the employee, rather than being allotted by the insurance company in terms of rank and seniority.

In our basic *absence day* model (column 2 of Table 2), the added 3.98 days for female workers occurred in the context of a population mean of 26.26 days. In comparison, we now find an *illness day* effect for women that is almost as large—3.52 days—but in reference to a population mean of 7.07 illness days. Thus, almost all of the gender differential in absence days is taken as illness days, which is the principal component of the more comprehensive measure that can be manipulated by an employee.

Table 3. Illness Means for Variables in the Study, Insurance Company, 1977[a]

1. Race		**5. Salary Grade Level**[b]	
White	6.47	*SGL(1)* = 1,2	8.24
Black	8.99	*SGL(2)* 3	7.69
Oriental	5.07	*SGL(3)* 4	7.94
Hispanic	8.50	*SGL(4)* 5,6	8.46
		SGL(5) 7-9	6.25
2. Sex		*SGL(6)* 10-12	4.53
Male	4.33	*SGL(7)* ≥ 13	2.89
Female	8.03		
		6. Seniority[c]	
3. Age[c]		*Sen(1)* < 1 year	6.07
AGE(1) < 23 yrs.	7.44	*Sen(2)* 1-2 yrs.	7.68
AGE(2) 23-26	7.30	*Sen(3)* 2-3	7.89
AGE(3) 26-31	6.90	*Sen(4)* 3-5	7.37
AGE(4) 31-40	6.22	*Sen(5)* 5-9	7.50
AGE(5) 40-50	6.39	*Sen(6)* 9-15	6.34
AGE(6) ≥ 50	8.33	*Sen(7)* ≥ 15	6.35
4. Education		**7. Corporate Division**	
EDUC(1) H.S. or less	8.59	*Agency*	6.01
EDUC(2) H.S. plus some college	7.43	*Corporate*	7.41
EDUC(3) H.S. plus 60 or more credits	6.97	*Group*	7.73
		Individual	7.30
EDUC(4) B.A. degree	4.04	*Investment*	5.19
EDUC(5) B.A. plus some grad. work	3.72	**8. Geographic Location**	
EDUC(6) M.A., Ph.D.	3.85	*Home Office*	7.54
		Other location	6.74

Notes: [a] Entries are mean number of days absent from work during 1977. Number of observations = 9,788.
[b] SGL(i) dummies refer to the 20 salary grades of the insurance company. (1) = lowest grade, (20) = highest grade.
[c] Categories constructed from continuous variables (*age, seniority*) contain their low endpoints.

While controls are not necessary to adjust for the impact of organizational rules before comparing the illness days of men and women, we wish to ascertain the extent to which the gender effect is due to the association of the female term with other factors. One set of variables concerns the background characteristics, age and education. The relevance of age is apparent; health problems should be more prevalent among older workers. The salience of education is less clear; it could turn out to be insignificant, though we expect well educated individuals to be more involved with work and career, less prone to take days off for personal reasons.

Column (2) of Table 4 reports the effects of the two variables[5] on number of illness days. Note, first, that the inclusion of age and education markedly reduces the magnitude of the female coefficient. This indicates that a significant

Table 4. Regression of Number of Illness Days in 1977 on Individual and Organizational Variables (OLS Estimates)[a]

Independent Variable[b]	(1)	(2)	(3)
Intercept	3.950*	5.625*	4.208*
Black	2.181*	2.182*	1.574*
Oriental	−1.285	−0.391	−0.753
Hispanic	1.797*	1.621*	1.136
Female	3.518*	2.361*	2.374*
Age (2)		0.672	0.722
Age (3)		0.625	0.897
Age (4)		0.511	1.078**
Age (5)		0.711	1.378**
Age (6)		2.414*	2.827*
Educ. (years of schooling)		−0.522*	−0.427*
Salary grade			−0.180*
Seniority (years)			0.019
Corporate			1.262**
Group			2.165*
Individual			0.904
Investment			1.146
Home office			1.516
R^2	.02	.02	.03
N	9788	9788	9788

Notes: ** $p < .05$; * $p < .01$.
[a] Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Illness day mean = 7.07 days.
[b] Deleted terms from categorical variables are *White, Age(1)*, and *Agency division. Education, salary grade,* and *seniority* are introduced as continuous variables.

part of the initial gender disparity in illness days is due to age and education differences between men and women in the insurance company. The female coefficient is still substantial, however, 2.36 illness days. The age effects, incidentally, are in line with our expectations about the life course of health: there is little impact on illness days over much of the age range, but the effect becomes pronounced for employees age 50 and older—the term *Age(6)*. The education coefficient is negative and substantial; this may reflect our observation about the personal uses of illness days, together with an association between work commitment and education via the career opportunities made available to better educated employees.[6]

Column (3) reports a more detailed model, in which controls have been added for several organizational variables—salary grade, seniority, division, and location.[7] The female term, 2.37 days, is virtually unchanged by inclusion of the structural variables (though the racial effects are diminished). While this number may appear small, recall that mean illness days for male employees is 4.33 (Table 3). The residual, unexplained female effect, therefore, is more than 50 percent of the unadjusted male rate. We therefore conclude that the gender disparity in illness day taking is large, and that it remains substantial after controlling for a variety of human capital and organizational variables. Again, our failure to eliminate the gender difference by inclusion of the human capital and structural terms suggests that its origin lies outside the workplace.

FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THE IMPACT OF FAMILY ON WOMEN'S WORK INVOLVEMENT

While we have been examining gender differences in illness days, our interest is not with this issue narrowly; we come to it because of a presumption that household responsibilities are more burdensome to female employees than to males and, as a result, women select occupations, change jobs, and make other career-relevant decisions partly in reference to their family chores. The absence day and illness day files are of interest because they permit some insight into how female employees respond to short-term and unexpected intrusions of family needs into the work domain. In the preceding sections we sought to ascertain the *magnitude* of the gender disparity; in the present section we investigate the *character* of the sex difference in number of illness days. A focus on three variables—age of the employee, age of the youngest child, and the dispersion of illness days—provides the focal point of this investigation.

Age of the Worker

If women bear a disproportionate responsibility for family chores, we should expect to observe a particular age/sex relationship in the taking of illness days. In particular, during years of peak family demand, when children are young, we expect the need for illness days for the purpose of addressing family requirements to be at a maximum. How, then, does the number of illness days vary by age and gender of an employee? Table 5 reports two regression equations that bear upon this question; Figure 1 presents graphs based on the regression results.

The curves in the top panel of Figure 1 describe the age × sex relationship before inclusion of the controls. The effects are attenuated when the background and institutional variables are introduced, but they are still pronounced (lower panel). These shapes make sense in terms of our

Table 5. Effects of Age and Gender on Number of Illness Days in 1977 (OLS Estimates)[a]

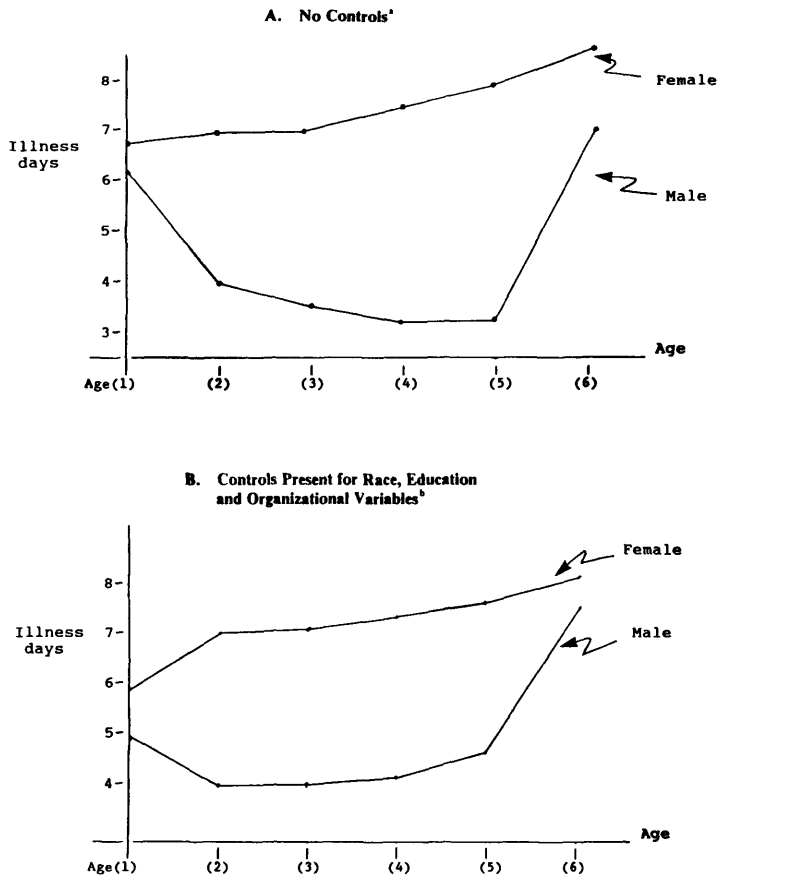
Independent Variable[b]	(1)	(2)
Intercept	6.137*	5.365*
Black	2.364*	1.541*
Oriental	−1.070	−0.776
Hispanic	1.969*	1.105
Female	0.623	1.043
Age (2)	−2.171	−0.805
Age (3)	−2.688**	−0.639
Age (4)	−3.006*	−0.524
Age (5)	−2.971**	−0.150
Age (6)	0.944	2.959**
Age (2) × *Female*	2.560	1.724
Age (3) × *Female*	3.124**	1.755
Age (4) × *Female*	3.632*	1.893**
Age (5) × *Female*	3.961*	1.770**
Age (6) × *Female*	1.379	−0.396
Educ. (years of schooling)		−0.420*
Salary grade		−0.168*
Seniority (years)		0.020
Corporate		1.245*
Group		2.143*
Individual		0.898
Investment		1.059
Home Office		1.514*
R^2	.02	.03
N	9788	9788

Notes: ** $p < .05$; * $p < .01$.

[a] Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Illness day mean = 7.07 days.

[b] Deleted terms from categorical variables are *White*, *Age(1)*, and *Agency division*. *Education*, *salary grade*, and *seniority* are introduced as continuous variables.

speculations: For men there is little variation in illness days over the age range through *Age(5)*—less than 50 years—but a sharp increase characterizes the oldest group. The curve for men approximates the need for illness days that we would associate with sickness and disability over the life course. For women the illness day rate is close to the male value for the youngest group, when many would not yet have begun childbearing, and for the oldest group, when the time demands of child rearing would have declined. However, during the



Notes: [a] Data are from column 1 of Table 5. Scale values are for Whites.
[b] Data are from column 2 of Table 5. Scale values are for Whites, Agency employees, and means of the other variables.

Figure 1. Age Patterns in Number of Illness-Days in 1977, by Gender

middle years, when family responsibilities are most consuming of parental time, the gap is large—averaging 2.8 days—even in the presence of the controls.

Age of Youngest Child

We assume that children who are below school age require a large amount of parental time. If women bear the main responsibility for this care giving, we should find that the highest rate of absence taking by female employees

occurs for those with young children. The company's records contain information on childrens' ages, permitting a test of this thesis. We constructed three categorical terms to denote employees with a youngest child of a particular age: *AYC(1)* indexes employees with a child age 5 or younger; *AYC(2)* denotes employees whose youngest child is between 6 and 12; *AYC(3)* denotes employees not in one of the preceding categories; that is, workers with children older than 12 or without children. We expect that demands on parental time and, hence, on the need for taking illness days, will decrease from *AYC(1)* to *AYC(3)*.

One adjustment is necessary before proceeding with the analysis. As noted earlier, our information about pregnancy leaves was imputed from children's ages. In particular, to remove the possibility that the gender difference in absence days might stem from this biological fact, rather than from the household division of labor, women were deleted from the study if a child was born in 1977 or in 1978. However, there is some degree of error in the AYC variable, in that a child's birthdate is recorded for only 37 percent of employees. In most cases this omission correctly implies assignment to category *AYC(3)*—either because the employee has no children, or because the children are older than 18 or otherwise not legal dependents.[8] In some instances, however, due to lags in the entering of childbirths in the company's records, valid new dependents may have been omitted.

Omission of a 1977 pregnancy leave would be consequential for the present analysis, since a child's year of birth is the basis of categorizing employees on the *AYC* variables. Further, because the mean spacing between successive births is approximately 45 months (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1986, Table 1-26), it is likely that unrecorded births in 1977 would have occurred, disproportionately, to women having a *reported* child aged 5 or younger. Retention of these women in the analysis would raise the 1977 absence day count in the *AYC(1)* category—but for a biological reason—biasing the results *in favor* of the hypothesized gender effect.

We therefore chose to err on the side of overcorrection by deleting all employees who took more than six weeks of sick leave during 1977. This censoring will remove some instances of leave taking by men, and by women for reasons other than pregnancy, but it will eliminate most women who took time off for childbearing. Consistent with this supposition, while the original sample of 9788 cases is reduced by 6.8 percent, 4.9 percent of males are removed, 7.1 percent of females are deleted.

Using the restricted data set we investigated the effect of age of youngest child on absence taking.[9] The absence measures that we report are illness days, half-days, and a summary variable, "number of days with either an illness or a half-day code."[10] We examine half-days because this is an alternate way by which employees can respond to unanticipated demands arising outside the work role. The rationale for the summary variable is that individuals may

specialize, taking one or the other type of absence when responding to family needs (which might depend, for example, on the travel time between home and work); in this situation, the aggregate measure would be the better indicator of the intrusion of household responsibilities into the work domain.

The results from these investigations are presented in Table 6. In each model the *AYC* terms, and their interactions with female, indicate that absence taking declines for women as one moves from the most to least demanding parental context (*AYC1* - *AYC3*), but there is no corresponding trend for men. Figure 2 reports the results graphically for each of the component measures, in order to convey more clearly the differential sensitivity of absence taking to youngest child's age. (With the summary measure the gender disparity is accentuated.) These findings constitute additional evidence for our thesis about the differential impact of unanticipated family demands on the work careers of men and women.

The Dispersion of Illness Days

Our final investigation with the absence data relates to the variance of illness days. If days away from work are used by women to discharge unanticipated family demands, as we posit, then the pattern of taking illness time should be different from the pattern associated with personal sickness. In particular, to the extent that the days are used to address minor family crises—a suddenly ill child, an unavailable baby sitter—they should be scattered through the year rather than concentrated in a few weeks.[11]

Table 7 reports the results from an investigation of the dispersion of illness days. In this analysis we used as observations all employees who reported two or more illness days during 1977; workers with zero or one day were omitted, as they have zero dispersion. Also, we have added a control for number of illness days, since this variable is correlated with both the dispersion measure and with the female term.

From column (1) we observe that women—along with the racial minorities—have a significantly larger dispersion of illness days than either whites or males (the reference categories). In column (2), after addition of controls for the individual and institutional variables, we note that the racial effects are much smaller, insignificant for two of the three groups. The female coefficient remains significant though it is also diminished. If we accept the assumption that the scattering of illness days through the year is indicative of their use in responding to minor crises external to the workplace, then the results here are consistent with our thesis about the effect of the household division of labor on women's work involvement.

To summarize the findings to this point, we conclude that there is substantial evidence to the effect that employees use illness days and "half-days" to alleviate the often conflicting demands of household and workplace. Absence taking,

Table 6. Effects of Age of Youngest Child on Number of Illness Days and Number of Half Days Taken in 1977 (OLS Estimates)[a]

Independent Variable[b]	(*1*) *Illness Days*	(*2*) *Half Days*	(*3*) *Half-Day or Illness Code*[c]
Intercept	4.645*	1.788*	6.433*
Black	0.694*	0.497*	1.191*
Oriental	−0.612	0.056	−0.556
Hispanic	0.354	0.303**	0.657**
Female	1.150*	−0.239**	0.911*
AYC (1)	0.035	−0.226	−0.191
AYC (2)	0.056	−0.544*	−0.488
AYC (1) × Female	0.685**	0.964*	1.649*
AYC (2) × Female	0.124	0.976*	1.099*
Age (years)	0.027*	0.024*	0.051*
Educ. (years of schooling)	−0.194*	−0.025	−0.219*
Salary grade	−0.101*	−0.015	−0.166*
Seniority (years)	0.001	0.048*	0.048*
Corporate	0.285	0.765*	1.050*
Group	0.595*	1.669*	2.264*
Individual	−0.416**	1.601*	1.189*
Investment	0.441	0.737*	1.177*
Home office	1.532*	−0.112	1.420*
R^2	.07	.09	.09
N	9121	9121	9121
Dependent variable (mean)	4.49	2.24	6.73

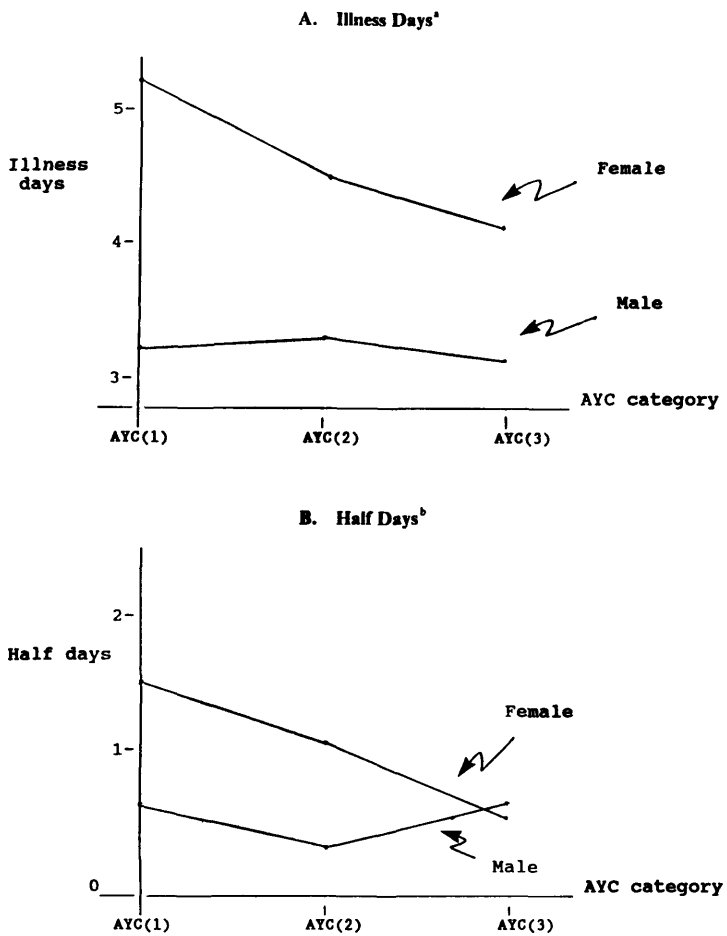
Notes: ** $p < .05$; * $p < .01$.

[a] Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Individuals with more than six weeks of sick leave in 1977 have been deleted.

[b] *AYC(1)* = 1 if youngest child is aged 5 or younger; 0 otherwise. *AYC(2)* = 1 if youngest child is between 6 and 12; 0 otherwise. Deleted term—*AYC(3)*—denotes employees without children or for whom the youngest child is 13 or older. Also deleted are terms for *White* and *Agency division*. *Age, education, salary grade,* and *seniority* are introduced as continuous variables.

[c] Dependent variable is "number of days absent with either a half-day code or an illness code." See text for explanation of this measure.

we have argued, is functional for managing instances of the intrusion of sudden and unanticipated family needs into the workplace. The evidence is also strong that the primary responsibility for attending to these crises is borne by working women, not by husbands. Finally, we emphasize that while no single analysis in this paper is sufficient for carrying the weight of the conclusions that have been drawn, the consistency of results from the several investigations—



Notes: [a] Data are from column 1 of Table 6. Scale values are for Whites, Agency employees, and means of the other variables.
[b] Data from column 2 of Table 6. Scale values are for Whites, Agency employees, and means of the other variables.

Figure 2. Number of Illness Days and Half Days Taken in 1977 by Male and Female Employees, by Age of Youngest Child

regarding number of absence and illness days, the age pattern in illness day taking, age of youngest child, and the dispersion of illness days—serves to bolster the credibility of our assessment.[12]

Table 7. Regression of Dispersion of Illness Days on Individual and Organizational Variables (OLS Estimates)[a]

Independent Variable[b]	(1)	(2)
Intercept	1.873*	3.237*
Black	0.314*	0.133*
Oriental	0.363**	0.264
Hispanic	0.343*	0.129
Female	0.334*	0.146*
Illness Days (no.)	0.211*	0.213*
Age (years)		−0.022*
Educ. (years of schooling)		−0.015
Salary grade		−0.044*
Seniority (years)		−0.014**
Corporate		−0.323*
Group		−0.318*
Individual		−0.281*
Investment		0.171**
Home office		0.263*
R^2	.83	.85

Notes: ** $p < .05$; * $p < .01$.
[a] Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Dependent variable is *number of weeks* in which one or more illness days was taken. Mean of dependent variable equals 4.44. Observations are all employees with two or more illness days during 1977. $N = 6547$.
[b] Deleted terms from categorical variables are *White* and *Agency division. Age, education, salary grade,* and *seniority* are introduced as continuous variables.

External Validation

Although we suggest that the findings from these complementary analyses support a contention that employed mothers (but not fathers) respond to family crises by taking illness days, two issues warrant further attention. First, it is possible that the results are idiosyncratic of the particular firm we have studied and are not characteristic of employee accommodations, more generally, to household responsibilities. Second, there is a question of whether the noted gender patterns might not arise from sex differences in morbidity rates.

We lack comparable data on illness-day taking in other firms. However, Klein (1986), using several items from the May 1985 Current Population Survey, has reported an analysis of hours lost from work, by men and women, which can provide insight into these issues. Klein's data differ from ours in several important respects: his data are representative of the labor force and

reflect the tendency for men and women to segregate into different work environments, with disparate physical demands and needs for illness days;[13] Klein's statistic measures hours lost in a reference week, relative to the number of hours usually worked. Nonetheless, we would expect similar patterns of qualitative results.

Klein classified self-report items from the CPS regarding time lost from work into the categories "illness and injury" and "miscellaneous reasons," the latter encompassing personal, family, and civic commitments. From his Table 4 we calculated worktime lost, by age of youngest child; also, from unpublished data provided by Dr. Klein we calculated worktime lost, by age of the employee.[14] Our computations, intended to create categories roughly comparable to those in the insurance company study, are reported in Table 8.

Columns (1) and (2) of Panel A refer to worktime lost in the reference week of the survey, and can be compared with Panel A of Figure 1. It is evident that the qualitative features of the age patterns do replicate: in the CPS data, the rate for female is fairly constant over the age range, modified by a small rise in the oldest age group. In comparison, the male rate begins high, then declines, and subsequently increases, producing the "U"-shaped curve depicted in Figure 1.

Klein's data permit the lost worktime to be decomposed into lossage attributable to *own* illness and lossage due other factors. Since there is little motivation for a respondent to misrepresent the cause of missed worktime to a Census Bureau interviewer, we assume that the "illness" category measures morbidity, while hours lost for "miscellaneous reasons" captures accommodations made for family and household demands, as well as for other personal and civic commitments. To emphasize: in the insurance company, and in many other firms, there is little opportunity to take unscheduled time off with pay, except by calling in sick; whereas in the CPS data we presume that the true reason for lost time is reported.

From columns (3) and (4) we observe absence rates for illness which have but one notable feature: an initial decline, followed by a trend to greater lost time with increasing age. The female rates are consistently higher than the corresponding male values, though the age trends do not differ by gender. In contrast, the age patterns in time lost for "miscellaneous reasons" (columns 5 and 6) are quite different. For men there is a consistent decline, while the female trend is one of an increase to a maximum in the age range 20-44, and a decline thereafter. Consistent with the insurance company data, we observe a maximum gap between men and women in lost worktime in the middle years; but with the CPS data the gap cannot be attributed to gender differences in morbidity rates.

In Panel B of Table 8, information is presented on lost worktime, by age of youngest child; columns (1) and (2) from this table can be compared with Panel A of Figure 2. Among men, we observe no tendency to greater absence

Table 8. Percent of Time Lost From Work, by Employee Characteristics and Gender, May 1985[a]

	Total		*Illness and Injuries*		*Miscellaneous Reasons*		*N (Total)*	
	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*	*(5)*	*(6)*	*(7)*	*(8)*
Age	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*
A. AGE OF EMPLOYEE								
16-19	3.2	3.5	1.7	1.6	1.4	1.9	793	1,157
20-24	3.0	2.2	1.2	1.0	1.8	1.1	4.490	5.710
25-44	3.6	1.9	1.7	1.2	1.8	.6	17,232	25,657
45-54	3.2	2.2	1.9	1.6	1.2	.6	4,971	7,390
55-64	4.0	3.1	2.7	2.5	1.2	.6	3,008	4,848
B. AGE OF YOUNGEST CHILD								
Less than 6	7.5	1.8	1.9	1.1	5.6	.7	3,392	9,172
6-17	3.1	2.0	1.8	1.3	1.3	.7	4,795	9.422
No child under 18	3.1	2.5	1.9	1.7	1.2	.8	7,971	11,669

Note: [a] Table entries measure number of hours absent from work during the reference week relative to number usually worked. Panel A observations are wage and salary workers employed full-time in a single job; panel B observations are a subset, consisting of married men and women with spouse present.

Sources: Panel A entries were calculated from data supplied by Bruce W. Klein; Panel B entries were computed from Klein (1986, Table 4). Original data source is the May 1985 Current Population Survey.

taking when a young child is in the household, whereas there is an evident and substantial effect for women. This effect is captured entirely by the youngest age category, possibly because the subsequent category in Klein's sample spans ages 6-17, in contrast to the more restricted 6-12 age range in our data. Nonetheless, the tendency for women with young children to take off more time from work than men in comparable circumstance is evident in both data sets.

In columns (3)-(6), total lost worktime is decomposed into lossage because of own illness and lossage for miscellaneous reasons. The results are quite clear about the source of the youngest child effect: it is not driven by morbidity; it is entirely a consequence of the higher female rate in the miscellaneous category. There is no evidence of a relation between age of youngest child and worktime lost for reasons of illness—either for male or female employees. Further, among men, there is no correspondence between age of youngest child and worktime lost for miscellaneous reasons.

In summary, the pattern of taking illness days, noted with the insurance company data, does replicate, and little of the effect is due to morbidity differences between men and women. This assessment enhances our confidence in the conclusion that the intrusion of family obligations into worktime is often met by one member of a dual career couple reporting ill, and it is the employed mother, principally, who responds in this manner. It may be true, as Bielby

and Bielby (1988, p. 1031) contend, that women "allocate more effort" than men to work activities when present on the job—a claim to which we will turn—but it is also the case that in order to manage their multiple responsibilities they take additional illness days.

REASON FOR DEPARTURE

If absence days are used by working spouses to accommodate the unexpected intrusions of family obligations into the workplace, we contend that the conflict between work and household roles is sometimes more pervasive and cannot be managed by short-term expedients. In particular, we suggest that women terminate employment for reasons different from those of men, that women depart more for factors related to family and home and less from considerations of work career.

The suggestion that women terminate for reasons different from men's has been made by other investigators (e.g., Meitzen 1986; Polachek 1975; Viscusi 1980). Such conclusions, however, usually have been based on inferences, either from the reemployment rates of the two groups subsequent to a departure (Barnes and Jones 1974), or from an examination of the different effects of age and other covariates on the departure proclivities of men and women (Viscusi 1980; Waite and Berryman 1986). In short, the analytic strategy has been one of *inferring* the reason for employment separation from observed behaviors.

The data available to us permit a more refined examination of gender differences in reason for termination. These data come from the exit interviews of departing employees. In company records the response to a question about cause of departure is coded in terms of 18 alternatives. As noted in the introduction, the completion rate of this interview approaches 100 percent; a precise value could not be ascertained because the few cases of missing data could have resulted from coding error or from a failure to undergo the interview. In any case, the loss is small, approximately 2 percent of total departers, and any bias would be negligible.

The present investigation is based on a 50 percent sample of job histories in the employee data base, and covers the period 1971-78. The records of 10,515 departers are included in this sample. In column (1) of Table 9 we report a summary distribution of the stated reason for termination. Aside from the category "other" (48), the main causes are a desire for higher earnings (01), more interesting or suitable work (07), change of residence (24) and dismissal (65). Approximately 10 percent of departures occurred for each of these reasons. The company classifies the termination causes into three categories: controllable, uncontrollable, and involuntary. While these captions seem dubious and arbitrary, we report the categories as they appear in the company's records.

Table 9. Reason for Employment Termination, by Gender, 1971-78

Termination Reason	*(1) Percent*	*Percent by Gender*[a] *(2) Male*	*(3) Female*	N^b
Controllable				
01 Higher earnings	10.6	10.9	10.5	1110
03 Better working conditions	0.8	0.3	0.9	82
04 Greater opportunity	7.1	15.6	5.5	749
05 Nearer home or better transportation	2.9	1.9	3.1	306
07 More interesting or suitable work	10.0	10.7	9.8	1047
50 Enter agent's contract[c]	0.5	1.7	0.3	51
Uncontrollable				
20 Pregnancy	4.4	0.0	5.3	463
24 Change of residence	11.5	4.7	12.8	1207
28 Return to school	6.7	8.0	6.4	700
32 Household duties	5.9	0.1	7.0	616
36 Health—personal	3.4	2.7	3.6	362
40 Illness in family	1.7	0.8	1.8	175
44 Military service leave	0.3	1.1	0.1	29
48 Other	15.0	12.9	15.4	1577
Involuntary				
65 Dismissal	10.5	12.2	10.2	1108
70 Position abolished	3.5	2.4	3.7	364
80 Retirement	4.9	12.3	3.4	511
90 Death	0.5	1.6	0.3	56
Total	100.2	99.9	100.1	10514

Notes: [a] During 1971-78, 16.1 percent of departers were male, 83.9 percent were female.
[b] N = number of departers in a 50 percent sample of all employees during the 8-year interval.
[c] A change of employment status within the company.

An examination of the distribution of reasons by sex (columns 2 and 3) suggests that several tap strong gender effects. This reflects both biological distinctions (e.g., pregnancy [20]) and social factors that differentially produce attachments to other institutions (e.g., military service [44]). A principal consideration, for our purposes, concerns the constraints faced by working spouses as a result of the household division of labor. In particular, we note that departure because of household duties (32) is fairly common among women (7 percent of terminations), but rare for men (less than 1 percent). Similarly, departure because of residence change (24) is far more likely of women than of men (12.8 percent versus 4.7 percent). Others have indicated that this cause of employment separation is symptomatic of the subordination of wives' careers to husbands' work needs (see, e.g., Hoffman and Reed 1981; Marwell, Rosenfeld and Spilerman 1979).

There are other gender differences that, though substantial, are likely to arise from the operation of third factors. In particular, retirement (80) is a more common cause of termination for men (12.3 percent versus 3.4 percent for women). Yet, this reflects the age distributions of the employees—in 1977, for instance, the mean age of men was 39 years, versus 33 for women. Less explicable is the gender difference in rate of departure for better opportunity (04)—15.6 percent for men, 5.5 percent for women. Possibly this is an educational effect (male employees have more schooling—an average of 14.6 years of study, in comparison with 12.9 for females); possibly the discrepancy taps differences between the sexes in risk taking or in career objectives. The data, however, do not permit us to choose among alternative explanations of departure for any *single* reason.

Logit Regressions

What we are in a position to do is investigate common patterns in the several reasons for departure. As an initial step we estimated logit regressions for the different termination causes. Binary logits were used, rather than a multinomial model, because its coefficients are more readily interpretable (Swafford 1980, p. 681) and the present analysis is only a preliminary to a more refined assessment. Logits were estimated for each departure reason which accounted for at least 100 terminations; omitted, however, were pregnancy (20), personal health (36), "other" (48), position abolished (70), and retirement (80), as these terminations contribute little to an understanding of the *social* factors responsible for employment separations by men and women.

In columns (1)-(3) of Table 10 we report the impact of gender and education on terminations for each of the stated reasons. The entries are exponentials of regression coefficients in a model of the form,

$$\log[p_j/(1-p_j)] = \Sigma b_{ij}X_i \qquad (1)$$

in which p_j is the probability of termination for reason j and the $\{X_i\}$ denote covariates. The table entries therefore convey multiplier effects on the odds of departure for the noted reason from a one unit increase in the covariate (the effect of female in the case of gender, one year of additional schooling in the case of education). A value exceeding one denotes a magnifying effect, a value below one a contraction effect.

Each entry in column (1) results from a separate logit regression in which "female" is the sole covariate. The termination reasons have been grouped so that the first set contains instances in which the female likelihood is less than the male propensity, while the second set covers departure reasons in which the likelihoods are reversed. The gender effects are quite pronounced. Women are less likely to leave employment for better opportunity (04) or because of

Table 10. Contributions of the Gender and Education Terms to Termination for Different Reasons, from Logit and Survival Analyses

	Logit, No Controls[a]	*Logit, Controls for Individual and Organizational Characteristics*[b]		*Survival Regression, Controls for Individual and Organizational Characteristics*[c]	
Termination Reason	(*1*) *Female*	(*2*) *Female*	(*3*) *Educ.*	(*4*) *Female*	(*5*) *Educ.*
01 Higher earnings	957	.715*	1.006	747*	1.030*
04 Greater opportunity	.314*	.414*	1.095*	.519*	1.118*
07 More interesting or suitable work	.912	.755*	1.076*	.809*	1.088*
28 Return to school	.784*	.675*	1.288*	.622*	1.225*
65 Dismissal	.820**	.633*	.854*	.597*	.860*
05 Nearer home or better transportation	1.611*	1.531*	.883*	1.512**	.896**
24 Change of residence	2.962*	2.743*	1.145*	2.599*	1.177*
32 Household duties	63.435*	65.890*	.885*	65.490*	.938**
40 Illness in famliy	2.235*	2.040*	.857*	1.923*	.874**

Notes: ** $p < .05$; * $p < .01$.

[a] Entry is the exponential of the unstandarized coefficient for "female" in a binary logit for the indicated departure reason versus all other termination causes, and reports the multiplier effect of "female" on odds of departure for the inicated reason. Number of observations in each logit model = 10,514.

[b] Entry is the exponential of the unstandardized coefficient for "female" or "years of schooling" in a binary logit for the indicated departure reason versus all other causes of termination. Controls included for race, age, seniority, grade level, office location, and occupational speciality. Entry reports the multiplier effect on odds of departure for the indicated reason. Number of observations in each logit model = 10,514.

[c] Entry is the exponential of the unstandardized coefficient for "female" or "years of schooling" in a Gompertz model of departure for the indicated reason. Controls included for the terms listed in note b above. Entry reports the multiplier effect on the *rate* of departure for the indicated reason. The Gompertz shape parameter is negative for all departure reasons except "household duties," for which it is insignificant. Number of spells in each survival model = 75,080, which includes 10,514 spells that ended in employment terminations.

dismissal (65). What stands out, however, is their high departure rate for causes which suggest a stronger commitment to family or husband's employment needs than to own work career: for example, a desire to be nearer home (05) or termination because of household duties (32). The last effect is unstable because the male rate (base) is very small. It suffices to say that the female term is huge.

To what extent are the gender effects attributable to the fact that the groups differ in education, age, seniority, and on other organizational variables? In column (2) we report results from logit regressions in which controls have been added for these background characteristics.[15] The controls do not greatly alter the zero-order patterns, though in several instances in which the effects previously were weak (i.e., close to one), the sex-typing of departure reasons

is accentuated. Again, women are less likely than men to terminate for causes related to career development—higher earnings (01), better opportunity (04), more interesting/suitable work (07), or to return to school (28). In contrast, they have higher departure rates for reasons related to the constraints imposed by family responsibilities—a desire to be nearer home (05), change of residence community (24), household duties (32), or illness in the family (40).

Now, the logit formulation we have used examines the determinants of departure reason for individuals who have decided to terminate employment. The associated imagery suggests a *conditional* analysis; indeed, a two stage model in which individuals first decide whether or not to continue employment and then, if they leave, choose a termination reason. Its verisimilitude to the departure process is questionable, though it does provide a convenient first approximation, as well as facilitate an assessment of the sensitivity of the results to alternative methodological strategies.

Survival Regressions

A more appropriate procedure would be to use a competing risk model (Kalbfleisch and Prentice 1980, pp. 163-178). Here the imagery involves a temporal dimension: all employees are in the risk set— subject to departure for a particular reason—until an event occurs (termination for the noted reason) or the observation is censored. We assume that the risk of termination for any given reason is independent of the risk of leaving for another cause. A separate survival model can then be estimated for each departure reason, with all other terminations, as well as end of the study, treated as censored observations.[16]

In the survival formulation we let the rate of departure for reason j, after duration t, be

$$h_j[t|\mathbf{X(t)}] = \lim_{\Delta t \downarrow 0} P_j[t \leq T < t+\Delta t | T \geq t; \boldsymbol{X(t)}] / \Delta t \quad (2)$$

where $\boldsymbol{X(t)}$ is a vector of covariates that influence the departure rate, and P[.] denotes a probability. With regard to the shape of the hazard, we specify a Gompertz model,

$$\ln\{h_j[t|\mathbf{X(t)}]\} = \Sigma b_{ij} X_i(t) + c_j t \quad (3)$$

which is appropriate for estimating rates that either increase or decline uniformly with duration, as appears to be the case with respect to employment terminations (Meitzen 1986; Mobley 1982). In the above, $\{X_i(t)\}$ contains terms for race, sex, age, education, seniority and organizational variables (see note 15), and t indexes duration in a salary grade—the system clock in our model.[17] Estimation was by means of the computer program RATE (Tuma 1980).

Estimates from this model of the female effect on the departure reasons are reported in column (4). As before, the entries are exponentials of regression coefficients and the interpretation of the entries is identical to the case of logits. We observe that the pattern of gender effects is unchanged—women have a lower rate of termination than men for reasons associated with own career, but a higher rate of departure for reasons that can be attributed to family and household responsibilities. Moreover, the values of the coefficients in the two models are quite similar, suggesting considerable stability of the results across methods.[18]

Thus far, our interpretation of the pattern of gender terms is based on the surface meaning of the termination causes; that is to say, we have interpreted departures for change of residence or to be nearer home, for instance, as indicating a lower involvement with work career than departures for higher earnings or better opportunity. We are able, however, to supplement this "face validity" assessment with information on the contribution of education to departure for the different reasons.

The education variable is of interest because it indexes the value of a spouse's career to the household, in terms of prospective monetary rewards. In addition, it taps the likelihood that an employee is engaged in work that is reasonably satisfying and, as a consequence, the individual's presumed interest in remaining in the labor force (Lorence and Mortimer 1985; Spitze 1988, p. 45). With this interpretation of the education term we expect that additional schooling will increase the rate of departure for career reasons (since these terminations reflect decisions intended to enhance career prospects), but reduce departures for family and household reasons (which represent withdrawals from the labor force).

In columns (3) and (5) we find support for this contention. With one exception—change of residence (24)—all entries conform to the proposed thesis. Nor should one be misled by the closeness of the figures to the value one, which denotes no educational effect. The entries convey the contribution of a single year of schooling; thus the effect of four years study—a college degree in comparison with high school completion—on, for example, the rate of termination for family illness (40) would be a reduction of 42 percent ($1-[.874]^4$). Since we know that it is principally women who depart for this cause—and for reasons of family, more generally—it is fair to conclude that higher education reduces the departure rate of women for non-career reasons. It does so by raising the financial cost to the family of a labor force withdrawal, as well as providing the financial resources that can permit a couple to "buy out" of some household chores, such as by hiring a full-time care giver.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings from the insurance company study have implications for theory as well as social policy. Economists, traditionally, have explained gender differences in earnings in terms of weaker commitments by women to work careers, as reflected in time and effort inputs (Gronau 1988). Mincer and Polachek (1974), for example, suggest that women make smaller investments than men in specific human capital because they expect employment interruptions during their work lives, due to child care and other family responsibilities. In an attempt to integrate the manifold insights from human capital theory, Becker (1985) has proposed a comprehensive model of household income production.

Becker (1985, pp. S35-S42) argues that total family output (earnings plus performance of home care tasks) is maximized under conditions of a division of labor between husband and wife, each investing in activity-specific human capital. Unlike sociological accounts of traditional sex roles and their perpetuation via socialization processes (e.g., Coverman 1983), Becker's model does not require women to be the care givers. However, small initial advantages in the earning potential of men—whether from labor market discrimination against women, or from education or age differentials in the marital couple in favor of the husband—can lead to outcomes of extreme specialization due to the reinforcing effects of specific human capital investments.

From this model Becker derives predictions about effort allocation by husband and wife: In particular, that married women, on average, devote less effort to market work, acquire less human capital and, as a consequence, receive a lower hourly wage. However, in a recent paper, Bielby and Bielby (1988) have challenged this deduction from Becker's model. Examining self-report items on work effort from two waves of the *Quality of Employment Survey*, they conclude, in contrast to Becker, that married women, if anything, allocate *more* effort and energy to their labor market tasks than do men. Bielby and Bielby (1988, p. 1056) explain, "as women add work roles to their family roles, they generate the energy necessary to fulfill their commitments to the two sets of activities."

Our analysis of illness days is relevant to this question and suggests a contrary assessment. In the insurance company, employees are not paid according to hours worked, but receive a monthly salary. An employee who is absent because of illness is paid a full wage; in short, the company does not adjust earnings (in the short term) to reflect variations in time inputs when the ostensible reason for lost time is personal illness. In this circumstance, an employee who works fewer hours has actually reduced *work effort*, in the sense that the employee has been less productive in the wage accounting period. Because married women take illness days for the purpose of managing household tasks, it is fair to conclude that the dual responsibilities of employment and family often do result in a lessening of work effort, as Becker has contended.

With regard to the consequence of family obligations for career attainments, there is direct evidence that motherhood depresses earnings and occupational status. In particular, Waite, Haggstrom, and Kanouse (1986) have compared labor force attainments of employed parents over the 24-month period subsequent to childbirth, with the attainments expected of them in the absence of a new child. For mothers they report a decline in hourly wage rate and in total earnings, as well as in occupational status; fathers show no such effects. What our own results contribute are insights into how the lesser attainments of women come about. In the insurance company there would not be an immediate earnings effect, since employees are paid for full-time work even when they report being ill. However, if high rates of absenteeism are costly to employers, if they make workers less productive, then the excess illness days taken by women eventually would depress their rates of advancement and earnings growth.

Social Policy Implications

If family responsibilities are a principal cause of the lower career attainments of women, then it is hardly surprising that an emphasis on antidiscrimination legislation and affirmative action programs would produce but modest results. Indeed, using one common measure of labor market success, twenty five years ago the average earnings of full-time employed women was 60 percent of male earnings; by 1983 the figure had improved, but only to 64 percent of male earnings (Blau and Ferber 1985, p.40).

A parallel emphasis, on modifying societal notions concerning appropriate work for women, may also be misdirected if the intent is to diminish the gender disparity in career achievements. Here the presumption is that much of the underpinnings of occupational segregation can be associated with the norms and values to which men and women are socialized; that these beliefs constrain the aspirations of young women and underlie, as well, the preferences of firms to utilize female workers in certain kinds of jobs (Marini and Brinton 1984). Yet, despite some noteworthy exceptions—such as the growth of female employment in law and medicine—assessments of occupational gender segregation have noted little change in recent decades (Bielby and Baron 1984; Blau and Ferber 1986, pp. 163-168), despite an evident reduction in stereotypical thinking about women's roles (Ireson and Gill 1988, pp. 147-148; Thornton and Freedman 1979). This appraisal is not intended to denigrate the importance of eliminating sexist beliefs, which do restrict the job options of many women, but that objective is not identical with formulating *efficient* strategies for reducing the gender disparity in career attainments.

Even the few instances of success in raising female employment in male dominated occupations are instructive about the burden of family obligations. For example, recent surveys of female physicians and dentists reveal a preference for group work, in contrast with solo practice, as this arrangement facilitates collegial substitutions when family chores intrude (Dolan and Lewis 1987). Similarly, female lawyers seek jobs having a delineated work day, in which the task requirements do not spill over into family time (Epstein 1983, pp. 315-321; "Careers" 1990). Large law firms, attempting to accommodate the multiple obligations of women associates, have developed what are termed "mommy track" programs, with provisions for parental leave, part-time work, and time extensions in regard to the partnership decision ("Saying No" 1990; "Women in the Law" 1988). Even women at the pinnacle of corporate careers, who have achieved notable success and hold ranks of vice-president and higher, report being several times more likely than their husbands to carry the principal responsibility for child care ("Executive Women" 1984).

A recognition of the centrality of family arrangements to the career prospects of employed women is implicit in discussions of the "egalitarian family" (Giele 1984, pp. 198-202). However, the evidence for more than modest change toward a family unit characterized by extensive sharing of domestic tasks is lacking (Duncan et al. 1973, pp. 7-19; "Executive Women" 1984; Pleck 1984, p. 241). If a broad consensus were to materialize on the desirability of greater sharing, its impact on role specialization could be substantial. At the same time, it is well to recognize that certain considerations will impel many couples to adopt a more or less traditional solution, irrespective of their preferences: family decisions often must be made which impact differently on the two work careers; because husbands tend to be older and (at time of marriage or childbirth) better established in their careers, financial calculations may necessitate an efficient, rather than equitable, division of labor.

If this assessment is correct, a more effective approach to reducing the gender disparity in career attainments would be to focus directly on arrangements that can alleviate the burden of family chores for working women. Others have remarked upon the importance of rethinking our child care arrangements (e.g., Coverman 1983, p. 635; Gerson 1985, pp. 216-232; Kamerman and Kahn 1984; Sullivan 1984), and the results from the present study underscore the need for such steps. Our analysis also makes clear the considerable burden to employers from having a large percentage of the workforce preoccupied with family obligations. These costs range from lost work days, to the unwillingness of employees to accept work assignments that are demanding of time (Hoffman and Reed 1981), to employment terminations by trained workers because of family responsibilities.

If only out of self interest, many large employers (e.g., Genetech, Merck and Co.) have established child care facilities on their premises; some have reported a subsequent reduction is absence taking by women and an improvement in morale ("Child-Care Center" 1987; "Women in the Law" 1988). This option, however, is practical only for large establishments. Smaller firms have addressed this problem by offering flexible work arrangements and including child care provisions in their benefit plans, to assist employees in contracting for child care services with private providers. (There are, incidentally, facilities which specialize in the care of a suddenly ill child, so that a parent need not lose time from work ["Corporate Support" 1986].)

Possibly the most severe problem relates to the special needs of poor families and single parents. In the case of the former, even two earners might not be able to afford child care costs—even when subsidized—especially if they have several children. To the extent that such individuals work for marginal employers, who make few human capital investments in their work force and expect high turnover, the employer's interest in alleviating child care burdens will be minimal. It is easier to select workers without young children than contend with these problems; indeed, the cost to a "socially responsible" employer who provides family benefits can be an erosion in his competitive position, in comparison with more self-interested firms. To address this situation legislation should be considered which mandates the provision of child care benefits by employers. This would help create a "level playing field" among competing firms, while ensuring that some child care relief is available to working women from all socioeconomic brackets.

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NOTES

1. Since our intent is to investigate sex differences in the *social determinants* of absence-day taking, we chose to exclude absences for gender-specific legal obligations and for physical reasons. Also, while we are analyzing absence-day taking in 1977, women who gave birth in 1978 were excluded because part of the pregnancy period, with its physical discomfort, might have occurred in 1977.

2. In terms of demographic composition, the insurance company is 69 percent female, 15 percent black, and 7 percent other minority.

3. The seniority intervals contain their lower endpoints. (In the employee data base the seniority variable is coded in months.)

4. The lowest seniority category, *sen1*, would appear to be an exception. However, it refers to illness days taken during a year of partial employment.

5. For consistency with the analysis to be reported in Table 5, age is introduced here as a set of dummies.

6. In an alternate specification we introduced education dummies along with the age terms. They reveal that illness days decline with years of schooling in a stepwise manner. High School or less (*E1*) forms one category; some college (*E2, E3*) forms a second grouping; college completion and further study (*E4, E5, E6*) constitute a third grouping. Such a result would be consistent with a career tracking structure in which the several educational attainment groups are directed to alternate career paths that differ in attainment prospects and generate, as a result, different degrees of work commitment.

7. Salary grade and seniority appeared as sets of dummies in Table 2, in order to mirror the effects of the company's vacation policy. That concern is not an issue here, so in the interest of parsimony these terms, which have essentially linear effects, are now reported as continuous variables.

8. The records of children's ages come from a section of the employee data base which enumerates dependents for tax purposes. Thus, children's ages are usually recorded only until age 18.

9. It should be noted that with the sample restriction omitted the results are qualitatively identical to the findings we report in this section. In short, there is little evidence of sensitivity to choice of number of weeks for the cutting point.

10. According to the company's handbook, the five personal days available to an employee may be taken either as full days or as half days. Vacation days can also be taken as half days. Illness days are not discussed. However, since the variable "number of days with either an illness or a half-day code" equals, in the data base, the sum of the totals of the two individual codes, it is evident that the component categories are mutually exclusive.

11. Most unpredictable events of the sort we have described are minor and can be managed in a single day. When longer time periods are required, we assume that the working parent can make arrangements in one or two days time for a substitute adult, so the pattern of days-off taking would continue to be characterized by multiple intervals, of brief duration, scattered through the year.

12. One point should be emphasized. In the foregoing analyses we have compared men and women, not married men and married women. Marital effects are therefore *inferred* as explanations of the gender differentials. The reason the study was not restricted to married men and women is because the marital status variable is unreliable. It has a high rate of missing data and there have been lags in updating the field to reflect changes in marital status. (Child's date of birth, in comparison, is a fixed item in the data set.) Any bias from not restricting the study to married employees would be one of weakening the postulated marital effects on illness-day taking. Note, in this regard, the correspondence of results between Panel B of Table 8 (in which the data have been restricted to married men and women) and Panel A of Figure 2.

13. An advantage of investigating these issues with data from a single firm is that one set of corporate policies governs the taking of illness days.

14. Klein's analysis covers wage and salary workers who usually work 35 or more hours per week and have a single job.

15. The following covariates were introduced: *race* and *sex* (dummy terms for white, black, oriental, Hispanic and female), *years of schooling, seniority, age, grade level* (six dummy terms), *home office location*, and *administrative versus clerical job specialty* (dummy terms for each).

16. This can be done because the likelihood function for the aggregate risk of termination can be decomposed into a product of the marginal likelihoods for the individual reasons, and the latter can be estimated individually (Lawless 1982, pp. 478-488).

17. There are two temporal variables that are relevant to departure decisions—time in grade and seniority. We chose to use the first as the "system clock" and to introduce the second as a covariate. This formulation allows for the possibility that the departure rate might increase with duration in a grade while, at the same time, declining with seniority.

18. The justification for this comparison is that the logit model, with appropriate modifications, can be used to approximate a continuous-time proportional hazards model, which includes the Gompertz as a particular case (Allison 1984, pp. 21-30; Kalbfleish and Prentice 1980, pp. 32-38).

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